

## **PRAISE FOR *REDEFINING HR***

‘This book has the potential to transform the future of HR. Lars Schmidt is a beacon of light, and his bold vision may well elevate a long-marginalized field into the force for good that it deserves to be.’

**Adam Grant, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Think Again* and *Originals*, and host of TED podcast *WorkLife***

‘The uniquely uncertain circumstances during 2020 reinforced the importance of HR as present, communicative, empathetic, innovative, courageous and creative. This book is a window into that world. Lars Schmidt is a gifted storyteller and harnesses his own unique voice and those of many other people leaders to paint a picture of what great HR can be. This book is essential reading for anyone looking to build people teams for today and tomorrow.’

**Katarina Berg, Chief Human Resources Officer, Spotify**

‘The events of 2020 reinforced the need for progressive and agile capabilities. We must be continually willing to disrupt ourselves and our talent practices in a disruptive world. As such, Lars Schmidt lays the groundwork for transformative people teams and approaches in this book. This is a bold window into modern people practices including real-world examples and essays from leaders building the future of the field.’

**Pat Wadors, Chief People Officer, Procure Technologies**

‘Lars Schmidt has a unique vantage point on all things people. What makes him so special is his ability to distill so many sources and inputs through his unique lens to paint a picture of what we can be at our best. *Redefining HR* is a blueprint for modern HR and people operations. It blends relatable stories, struggles and practices in a way that only he can bring to life.’

**Claude Silver, Chief Heart Officer, VaynerMedia**

‘You want a window into the future of our profession/industry? Then I suggest you start flipping through these pages. It chronicles fantastic thought leaders and insights about people and culture, respecting the history of our

industry while pushing forward and challenging the status quo in HR. If you're serious about driving behaviour and mindset change in your organizations, you don't want to miss out on the collective wisdom he's curated in this book. Lars Schmidt is the compassionate people and culture crusader of our time and what he's captured in these "next" practices is truly a gift to people leaders in our industry.'

**A J Thomas, Head of People Products, Strategy and Operations, X, the Moonshot Factory**

'A book project born out of curiosity, acknowledgement of transformation and need to do better. I appreciate how the author touches on the varied aspects of serving the people function within the organization without coming across as the authority. He thoughtfully weaves in the experiences and thoughts of others to deliver a read that is sure to add value as we journey to build companies and teams over the next decade.'

**Torin Ellis, Diversity Strategist, the torin ellis brand**

'Lars Schmidt has absolutely nailed the future of HR. This book is a must-read for business and HR leaders alike. This book is a fantastic, delightful read, full of insight and innovation. I couldn't put it down and now find myself forever changed on how I think about where we are headed. This is a homerun.'

**David Hanrahan, Chief Human Resources Officer, Eventbrite**

'The field of HR is evolving dramatically and it's never been more important to be on the front end of the curve. Lars Schmidt has pulled together some of the leading minds in the industry to pose the questions we should all be asking ourselves of what it means to great at people.'

**Maia Josebachvili, Former Head of People, Stripe**

'Lars Schmidt has been at the forefront of redefining what the HR function should be for many years. His ability to collaborate and seek out the input of leaders in this field is unparalleled. I highly recommend reading this book – it will open up and challenge your thinking on getting the best out of people in the workplace'.

**Beth Ann Steinberg, VP People & Talent, Chime and Founder, Mensch Ventures**

'I've worked with Lars Schmidt as a peer, customer, and co-founder for the past 10 years, and he is one of the most progressive practitioners in the field today. He not only spearheads modern HR practices but also elevates the field of his peer practitioners on a global scale. This book cuts through the corporate jargon and helps HR leaders understand the elusive "why" and "how" to implement results-aligned strategies. A rare blend of emotional intelligence and exceptional execution, Lars balances building from both the employer and employee perspective. He is a holistic thinker, a fearless advocate and a heck of a community builder.'

**Ambrosia Vertesi, Operating Partner, Operator Collective**

'Lars Schmidt has long been a forward-thinking expert in the people space, so it's phenomenal to see all of that greatness come together in a book that's both informative and practical. It is packed with thought-provoking ideas that provide exactly the kind of inspiration that the people space so woefully needs.'

**Ruth Penfold, People Practice Lead, bp Launchpad**



# Redefining HR

*Transforming people teams to drive business performance*

Lars Schmidt



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*This book is dedicated to the next generation of HR and people leaders  
who will continue transforming the field and push us all to be better.*





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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Lars Schmidt and I'm thrilled to share this book with you. It's the culmination of hundreds of hours of work: writing, interviews, reading, podcasts and more. Before you dig in, it might be helpful to know a bit more about me, what I value and how I operate.

I'm the Founder of Amplify (AmplifyTalent.com), a boutique HR executive search and consulting firm based outside of Washington DC that helps companies build progressive people teams and capabilities.

Before founding Amplify, I was fortunate to lead digital talent transformation at NPR and do some groundbreaking work recognized by Mashable, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post* and others. In prior roles, I was responsible for creating scalable high-growth global talent strategies at Ticketmaster, Magento and several startups in Los Angeles.

I'm an advocate for modern HR and work to accelerate the evolution of people team capabilities and impact through efforts like the HR Open Source initiative I co-founded, regular columns in *Fast Company* and *Forbes*, co-authoring *Employer Branding for Dummies* (Wiley, 2017), the Redefining HR (formerly 21st-century HR) podcast and media series, and talks around the world.

I love to build. I'm drawn to projects that combine transformation and impact – even better when combined at scale. I'm at my best when I'm faced with a new problem set where I can get creative.

I'm passionate about open-source projects and helping amplify and democratize access to templates, tools, resources and practices to help practitioners innovate and make an impact.

When I'm not doing things related to the above, I can be found at my Northern Virginia home where I'm dad to two wonderful daughters and husband to an amazing wife.

## FOREWORD

It was 2015 and Lars Schmidt was on a crusade: he wanted to end the war on talent. His solution was to open-source the work of HR practitioners. He had an earnest belief that employers shouldn't battle each other for candidates, but instead join forces to build a better workplace for all. In a different silo, I had been fighting this battle myself in a far less organized and far more hair-on-fire-frantic kind of way. His vision for a collaborative HR ecosystem was inspiring. The HR Open Source community he and his co-founder Ambrosia Vertesi created around that mission was vibrant. Without hesitation, I enrolled in the movement to better the world of work.

But this wasn't the start of the Human Resources revolution, no; it was simply the beginning of my relationship with Lars. The kindest rebel you'll ever meet, his punk-rock people philosophies have had a significant impact on the HR industry. Our community knows him to be a servant thought leader, one who cares deeply about giving platforms to the people who are changing the way the world goes to work. For over 20 years, Lars has been addressing and challenging the traditional institution of HR, imploring a dynamic shift in approach.

The reality is that the field of Human Resources had been woefully out of date for decades. Only in recent history has HR made the dramatic shift from the backroom to the boardroom, bringing people strategy to the forefront of business strategy. No longer are we relegated to compliance and benefits administration alone. We are detailed operators, yes, but also strategists, coaches and sherpas to this brave, new world – a world that doesn't view humans as resources, but rather as people who have unique perspectives, experiences and feelings. This book is a roadmap to that world.

*Redefining HR* gives us an opportunity to better understand the evolution of this field and how each of us can play a role in shaping its future. From leveraging policy to operationalizing culture to having fun with data, Lars focuses on practical, actionable approaches to catalyse change – within your organization, your career and the workplace at large. He includes case studies from forward-thinking people leaders, offers his own operational expertise and shares snippets from his podcast.

For those who didn't recognize the shift before, the events of early 2020 made it known that businesses that refused to lead people-first would suffer

the greatest tolls. Public health concerns, civic unrest and economic uncertainty plagued our communities; HR teams had never been more needed or more recognized as critical business partners. The urgency to create sustainable, equitable, diverse cultures of inclusion became non-negotiable. The HR community came together quickly to right the ship, sharing critical information openly to ensure all had access to supporting their teams. Pandemic playbooks, reductions in force toolkits and new workplace safety policies swept inboxes like wildfire. There was no competitive advantage to keeping things to ourselves. The battle wasn't between us but in front of us, and we were stronger together.

Lars' suggestion to simply *share more* has now become a flat-out imperative. *The world of work will never be the same again*. It is our responsibility to ensure we're building this next chapter with intention and care. Take from our past the good, but leave behind the things that weren't serving our mission to create a better workplace for everyone. Starting here, book in hand, I challenge each of you to rethink HR.

*Katelin Holloway*  
*Founding Partner, 776*

## PREFACE

It's time to redefine HR.

I'm not talking about whether we call the function 'Human Resources', 'People Operations', 'Talent and Culture' or any of the other terms we use to define ourselves. I'm talking about our capabilities. Our impact. How we develop and support each other to evolve our field. This is about shaking free of the legacy perceptions and dogma of our past and building something new.

Redefining HR means setting a new expectation of what HR can be. Higher expectations. For our companies, our employees and ourselves. Redefining HR is about building a new narrative of what it means to practise HR today, and tomorrow.

This book is a bridge to that world.

*Redefining HR* is an exploration of modern HR and people practices. It's an overview of how the field has evolved, with an emphasis on modern approaches that are redefining the field.

When I set out to write this book, I wanted to marry the theory and elements of modern HR with their practical application – interviews with progressive people leaders, case studies, examples. I didn't want to write another theoretical HR book. I wanted to create something tangible, real and relatable for practitioners out there doing the work. A blend of inspiration and education. Real stories. Real impact.

This book is the culmination of over 20 years in the field of HR. I've worn many hats during that time: individual contributor, executive, consultant, writer, author, speaker, podcaster, student, writer of overly complex bios. It's based on hundreds (thousands?) of interviews, consulting engagements, jobs, conversations, mistakes, and a drive to explore the boundaries of modern HR.

I've been fortunate throughout my career to work for and with progressive people leaders – mentors and muses who saw HR as a vital function to maximize the employee experience, but more importantly, a fundamental driver for a business's success. This book is a tribute to them – for lighting a spark in me that became a quest to spotlight all the good work that's happening in the field.



Before we dig into the meat of the book, I wanted to provide a brief introduction to give you some context on where I'm coming from when you read this.

I'm often asked what I do. The answer always feels embarrassingly complex and self-important. The truth is, I've managed to create a unique role for myself that allows me to tap into a range of 'day jobs' – HR executive search, consultant, speaker, podcaster and writer. If you had told me five years ago that this is what I'd be doing, I would have laughed in disbelief. If you had asked me 20 years ago, it certainly wouldn't be spending my career in HR. So how did I get here?

## Where it all began

In 1998, I entered the workforce as a fresh-eyed graduate ready to tackle the world. Following my five-year Marketing and International Business degree (I justify the fifth year with my double major, at least to my dad), I envisioned I'd be getting into advertising or marketing, or even PR. HR was never on my radar: I didn't even have any misconceptions about HR at that point.

The one thing I was certain of was that I wanted to move to Los Angeles, so I applied to the one company with an office in LA that came to my university career fair: Pencom Systems, a technical recruiting firm based in New York with offices across the United States. and Canada. Though I had no idea what recruiting was, after a series of interviews I accepted an offer and moved to New York for a six-month training programme on all things technology and recruiting. In December 1998, I arrived in Los Angeles ready to see what the 'dot-com craze' was all about.

The bubble was real. It was the Wild West in technology recruiting in those days. Every noun.com was falling into venture capital money. Few had revenue.

I worked with a lot of the Idealabs companies and others, including Goto.com, eToys and Netzero. Companies were hiring and relocating candidates and their families based on phone screens. It was crazy. It didn't last. The dot-com bubble burst a year after I arrived.

At an early stage of my career, I was at a crossroads: I enjoyed building connections and relationships in recruiting, but I struggled with the lack of control and influence on the client side that came with agency recruiting. I knew I needed to go in-house to see if staying in the field was right for me.

After a year in-house as a recruiting consultant building a software company, I moved into my first full-time in-house recruiting role at

Ticketmaster, where I spent the next seven years in seven jobs. This was my first deep dive into modern HR. I spent most of that time reporting to someone who became a mentor and shaped my career and views on the field more than anyone – Beverly Carmichael. Beverly was the former Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) of Southwest Airlines. Her leadership – informed by intelligence, competence, empathy and confidence – stretched me into roles outside my comfort zone. I loved that team. I loved what we built. I'm incredibly proud of the work we did at Ticketmaster. To this day, some of my fondest work memories reside in that experience.

When I moved on to Magento, an open-source e-commerce company that was later acquired by eBay, I met another mentor in their President, Bob Schwartz. Bob was a visionary leader who taught (and still teaches) me the power of communities, ecosystems and connection.

In 2010, I was recruited to National Public Radio (NPR) to run talent and innovation for a newly hired CHRO tasked with leading their transformation from radio/broadcast to digital – Jeff Perkins. Jeff gave me the keys to drive their talent strategy. It was my first time working in a non-profit. We were competing for talent on two fronts (digital/tech and journalism), mostly against for-profit companies. I knew traditional recruiting playbooks wouldn't work, so I built our strategy around the newly developing field of employer brand. We launched one of the first culture hashtags with #NPRlife in 2010 and developed brand ambassadors, aligned with marketing to leverage our consumer brand. It was an experimental lab and I loved it.

Jeff encouraged me to write and speak about what we were working on. In hindsight, that shaped much of my lean towards open-source and 'working out loud'. Looking back, it's easy to connect the through lines between all of those roles to extrapolate what I'm doing now, but at the time I was just living and working in each moment.

At the end of 2013, I decided to go out on my own. I was inspired by friends and young entrepreneurs I worked with through an NPR initiative I supported called Generation Listen. I wanted to see what I could build.

You know those stories about natural-born entrepreneurs destined to build great things? That was never me. I always wanted to be a 9–5'er working for the man and getting a steady pay check. Then I found a Blackberry strapped to my waist (my Blackberry came with a heavy holster and light shame). I got involved in social media and realized I'd never have a 9–5 job. So, I did what all sensible middle-aged, soon-to-be first-time fathers would do – I quit. Perhaps I need to rethink 'sensible' in that sentence?

In December 2013, Amplify Talent was born. My initial focus was employer branding and recruiting optimization consulting. I broadened to HR executive search in 2019 as I wanted to find a way to add more value to a growing global people executive network I was building.

Along the way I co-authored a book on employer branding, and began writing for *Fast Company*, *Forbes* and LinkedIn. I launched a podcast. I launched and shuttered a podcast about different careers (highlight: interviewing ‘Chunk’ from *The Goonies*). I travelled the world speaking at dozens of conferences and events. I cofounded a not-for-profit (HR Open Source) with my good friend Ambrosia Vertesi. Most importantly, I became a dad to two amazing girls. It’s been a wild ride.

I’ve seen a lot over those 20 years. I’ve notched a few wins and plenty of losses. I fell in love with the word ‘pilot’. I’ve done big things with small budgets and small things with big budgets. I’ve iterated – a lot. I’ve battled imposter syndrome when given tasks that I clearly had no business doing.

Through all of that, what I was really doing was realize that I had somehow managed to fall into a career I loved. A field that I felt made a difference in people’s lives. A job that could swing between maddeningly frustrating and the kind of complete elation that made me want to chase that high again and again.

The past five years in particular have really galvanized my views on the evolution of HR. As a cofounder of HR Open Source, I travelled the world meeting with practitioners and learning about their wins, struggles and barriers. As a writer and podcast host I’ve had many conversations with leaders who are transforming the field. I could distil them all into one clear takeaway: there’s never been a better time to work in the field of HR.

I wrote this book because I truly believe that, and I want you to see it for yourself. This book is written to educate, hopefully to inspire some ideas, and to challenge legacy perspectives around HR.

Let’s do this.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is actually one of the more difficult sections of the book to write, as hundreds of people have inspired and supported me over my career and deserve credit for this book. I can't possibly capture them all below, and I'm sure I'll miss people who *should* be here. Know that any omissions reflect my current quarantine-impaired memory, and not your impact on me.

One of the things that make this book special is the range of contributors adding deep subject-matter expertise, perspectives and stories.

When I set out to write this book, I knew it would need those tangible and relatable perspectives to frame the content with context. I didn't want to write an analyst or academic take on modern HR. I wanted to write a book for practitioners, by practitioners. The following people made that possible and I'm deeply grateful for their contributions to this book.

Massive thanks to Adam Ward, AJ Thomas, Al Adamson, Ambrosia Vertesi, Amy Thompson, Andrew Saidy, Anna Binder, Aubrey Blanche, Becky Cantieri, Beverly Carmichael, Bryan Power, Carmen Hudson, Caro Widenka, Ciara Lakhani, Claire Kennedy, Claude Silver, Colleen McCreary, Daniel Harris, Darren Murph, David Green, David Hanrahan, David Lee, Deb Gran, Dipti Salopek, Dominique Taylor, Garrison Gibbons, Guissu Baier, Jaison Williams, Jason Fried, Jeri Doris, Jessica Yuen, Jevan Soo, John Bersin, John Vlastelica, Johnny Sanchez, Josh Bersin, Joy Sybesma, Karen Eber, Katelin Holloway, Katie Burke, Kelly Jackson, Kelly Rew-Porter, Kristen Lisanti, Dr Laura Morgan Roberts, Leah Knobler, Madison Butler, Mai Ton, Maia Josebachvili, Matt Buckland, Matt Hoffman, Melissa Thompson, Michael DeAngelo, Michael Fraccaro, Mitasha Singh, Pat Caldwell, Perry Timms, Richard Mosley, Sarah Morgan, Sehr Charania, Stacy Zapar, Tara Turk and Zoe Harte. Your expertise, stories and perspectives helped bring life to this book.

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Editing the chapter on diversity and inclusion in the early days of the heightened consciousness around the Black Lives Matter movement and social injustice reinforced how important it was to get that chapter right. I'm deeply grateful for the editorial guidance and suggestions from Beverly Carmichael, Torin Ellis, Sarah Morgan and Victorio Milian to help broaden the perspective of the chapter and drive home the importance of embedding diversity-focused practices throughout the book.

This book is infused with inspiration from some of the titans of modern people thinking about approaches, who inspire and inform my work, including Laszlo Bock, Patty McCord, Adam Grant, Katarina Berg, Nellie Peshkov, Reid Hoffman, Katie Burke, Josh Bersin, Claude Silver, Katelin Holloway, Beth Steinberg, Ambrosia Vertesi, Dan Price, and others.

To my parents, Lillian and Kai Sr, and my brother, Kai Jr. I miss you every day and wish you were still alive to share this with me. Know that I carry the love, wisdom and kindness you invested in me every day and that desire

to give back is embedded in this book. To my nephew Kyle, your dad would be so proud of the man you've become – and so am I.

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